

**STATE HABITAT PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE (HPC)**  
**Meeting of January 24, 2015**  
**Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) Headquarters, Phoenix, AZ**

**Present:**

Commissioner J. W. Harris	Dave Daniels, AGFD
Commissioner Jim Ammons	Glen Dickens, AZ Antelope Foundation
Amber Munig, AGFD	Robert Fink, AGFD
Chip Young, AGFD	Steve Rosenstock, AGFD
Tom Mackin, Williams/Flagstaff HPC	Dennis Fogle, AGFD
Billy Masters, RMEF, Springerville/Alpine HPC	Darren Tucker, AGFD
Bob Birkeland, AGFD	Duane Aubuchon, AGFD
Mike Sumner, AGFD	Jim Lawrence, Mule Deer Foundation
Ed Jahrke, AGFD	Joe Currie, AGFD

**Welcome - State Habitat Partnership Committee Chairman, Commissioner John W. Harris**

Commissioner Harris welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending this meeting. Commissioner Harris thanked everyone for their years of hard work within HPC and announced that this would be his last meeting. He also introduced Mr. James Ammons, another member of the commission who may replace Commissioner Harris as the HPC Chairman.

**Introductions and Commissioner's Roll Call of Local HPCs**

The people in attendance introduced themselves and Commissioner Harris did the roll call. The following HPCs were represented at this meeting:

Springerville/Alpine – Billy Masters	Prescott – Darren Tucker
Winslow – Bob Birkeland	Southwest Arizona – Mike Sumner
Show Low – Bob Birkeland	Tucson – No representative
Williams/Flagstaff – Tom Mackin	Sierra Vista/Douglas – Glen Dickens
Forage Resource Study Group–Steve Rosenstock	Safford – Duane Aubuchon
Arizona Strip – Steve Rosenstock	Payson Nat. Resources Committee – Dave Daniels
Kingman – No representative	

Billy Masters is also representing the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), Glen Dickens is representing the Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) and Jim Lawrence is representing the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF).

**Agenda Review – Dennis Fogle, HPC Coordinator**

AGFD's State Habitat Partnership Committee Coordinator Dennis Fogle, reviewed the agenda. There were no changes or additions.

**Approval of Minutes from the Meeting of August 9, 2014**

A motion was made to approve the minutes, was seconded and carried unanimously.

## **2014 HPC Project Proposals and Special Big Game License Tag Funding**

Prior to the meeting, Dennis Fogle had provided the preliminary list of projects that were approved for funding this cycle to the local HPC's and Wildlife Conservation Organization's (WCOs). The group voted to approve the list with one exception, for which they took a separate vote. AGFD's Big Game Management Supervisor and Acting Game Chief Amber Munig provided an explanation of the exception to Project # 14-701 – Bighorn Sheep Genetic Analysis and Database. Amber elaborated on what items in this proposal need to be worked out with the proponent prior to funding. The proposal is for Phase 1 of a 3-phased project and it will be necessary to work out all the details prior to approval because a 3 phase project needs to be evaluated for all 3 phases. Commissioner Harris asked for a motion to tentatively fund 14-701, contingent upon clarification of the proposal and its deliverables. Glen Dickens made the motion, but there were no representatives from ADBSS present at the meeting today and there was no second. This funding commitment will have to be approved by the ADBSS board. Commissioner Harris then stated that once these points are satisfied, the project can then be funded out-of-cycle.

Other discussion prior to the approval of funded projects:

Project 14-611 – Approved funding was \$5K less than requested. Dennis and Amber assured Dave Daniels that this project would be fully funded and that this was a typo.

Project 14-101 – Hub Point Well was not approved for funding. Project proposal is for drilling a well and the WCO's expressed concerns with depth of the well and probability of hitting water. . Bob Birkeland explained that he has answers to many of the questions but both elk groups were not present. Joe Currie said that Development Branch may be able to provide some of the materials to ensure water is available year round for wildlife, worth about \$15K towards cost share (tank, trough and exclusion fence). The permittee would have to agree that water would always be available to wildlife even when cattle are not present. Billy Masters will take this to the RMEF committee and Bob Birkeland will contact the Arizona Elk Society in hopes of resurrecting this project.

Project 14-221 – North Canyon Trick Tank. Dennis explained that the buffalo WCO's had agreed to fund roughly half of the project if mule deer would do the same. Mule deer already committed \$10,471 to this project and only needed to commit another \$12,000. Dennis informed the group that \$10,000 had been unallocated back into the mule deer fund which would essentially take care of the additional \$12,000 requested. The Mule Deer Foundation agreed to the mule deer tag funding the additional \$12,000. No one from AZ Deer Association was present today. The HPC voted to approve the additional mule deer funding. Development Branch will have a contractor on the Kaibab Plateau this summer for another catchment, and so doing both catchments at the same time will save money. All the Arizona Strip water projects submitted this year are good projects, but limited funds preclude funding all in the same year. North Canyon was their first priority.

14-109 – Mineral Grassland Restoration – Coordination has been made with project proponent and they agreed to complete the project with partial funding from HPC. The elk tag will pick up \$75,200 toward this project which will provide enough funds to implement the grassland restoration.

Fund balances: Dennis explained possible issues surrounding high unspent and unobligated special tag fund balances. Amber explained that in light of the high unobligated elk tag balance, out of cycle projects will be strongly considered for elk tag funds. Any such proposals should be fully developed and submitted on the proper forms. Disclaimer: Out of cycle funding is not encouraged, except for the sake of reducing high unobligated balances.

It was mentioned that the elk groups are standing by waiting for good proposals with adequate cost share. Proponents are encouraged to contact AES and RMEF about project ideas.

Following this discussion, a motion was made and seconded to approve this cycle's project funding, with the exception of project 14-701. The motion carried.

### **Water for Wildlife – Tom Mackin, President, Arizona Wildlife Federation**

Tom gave a PowerPoint presentation about issues surrounding wildlife water developments and some of the issues with maintenance. A main point of the presentation addressed problems with vandalism, some obviously by hunters. He passed around a sample of new signage that asks anyone who notes vandalism to report it to the Department's Operation Game Thief (OGT). The Department will prosecute vandals as they are destroying wildlife habitat. Tom suggested trying to get permission from the Forest Service to install the signage on USFS waters. It was suggested to also solicit feedback on how the signage is working.

Tom is in the process of building a regional volunteer force for the Flagstaff area. Ed Jahrke expressed his appreciation to Mr. Mackin for all the great work his group has done to benefit wildlife. Tom in turn expressed appreciation for the Department's support of their work.

### **HPC Program Updates – Dennis Fogle**

Dennis presented a PowerPoint presentation on what's going on currently in the HPC program.

Main Points:

#### **HPC Completion Report Requirement:**

Progress reports are due annually by March 1<sup>st</sup>, and completion reports are due within 30 days of project completion. This reporting requirement is very important to the integrity of the program because it keeps funding partners informed about project progression and expenditures. This also provides information to create a landscape view of habitat work in the state and assists in management decisions. It was emphasized that future HPC project proposals will not be considered for funding, if proponents have not submitted a progress report or completion report for previously funded projects. Dennis will be sending out a progress report reminder, as well as updated forms, for both progress and completion reports. Progress reports can be simply submitted as an email, providing the current status of the project. This requirement is now mandatory per the HPC Chairman and Wildlife Management Division Assistant Director. Glen Dickens mentioned how mandatory reporting has helped him to identify match for his National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants.

#### **Archaeological Clearances:**

Dennis explained reasons why cultural clearances are a necessary part of the compliance documentation. Special tag dollars funded through the HPC process are considered state funds, which holds the Department liable for all HPC projects. Cultural clearances are required for any project that will require ground disturbance, even on private property. Dennis explained some of the options available to achieve compliance.

- Projects on federal land will require documentation from the particular agency ensuring cultural compliance has been met
  - Inventory standards form or documentation from archeologist will suffice
- Projects implemented by AGFD will require the EAC process

- Projects on private property require cultural clearance through the Department's Habitat Branch
  - Please coordinate with Dennis Fogle

**Other:**

- Special Tag License Tag Fund Match Form
  - Dennis will send out this document to all proponents approved for funding this cycle
  - This form allows the Department to use HPC funds as required match for Pitman-Robertson funds
- Reminders – HPC priorities document
  - Please review and send any recommendations for updating the document
  - One change is to possibly give priority to projects identified in Management Focus Areas (MFAs)
  - Amber explained MFAs as a component of the Department's Comprehensive Game Management Planning process
  - This document will also be sent out for review
- Glen Dickens mentioned that ADOT has done arch clearances on most of their right of ways.

**Cultural Clearances – John Hohmann, Cultural Resource Compliance Manager**

John conducted a PowerPoint presentation with an overview on the history of state and federal laws that govern cultural requirements, as well as his credentials and contact information. Main points:

- The AGFD is creating a new program - Cultural Resources Compliance Program
  - This program will help the Department in evaluating cultural clearance compliance for all projects coordinated by AGFD
- Please submit any external cultural survey reports to John's program
  - They will review and ensure proper compliance
- Please plan ahead - If you need their services, it could be several months before they can get to your project
  - The plan was to hire 2 archaeologists, but this is now on hold due to the recently imposed hiring freeze.
- For AGFD infrastructure projects, please submit your EA checklist – may be able to cover under a programmatic EA
- For projects on federal lands, contact the appropriate land management agency as they should have clearance documentation
- For State Trust Land projects contact State Land Department as they should have clearance documentation
- Maintenance projects should be OK if work will take place in the existing footprint
  - Coordinate with Dennis Fogle

It was suggested that this presentation should be back on the agenda for the summer meeting.

**Game Program Updates – Amber Munig, Big Game Supervisor**

Amber gave a briefing on MFAs – each region was tasked with developing MFAs as part of the Comprehensive Game Management Plan (CGMP). Amber explained the landscape level gist of the planning MFAs. Plans will

include any work the unit managers want to get done. By end of the FY, the Department should have a final CGMP which will be posted. The document is designed to be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Initiative (WHEI) areas – Units 16A and 21 for mule deer, and Units 31 - 32 for scaled quail. The budget is \$1 million, and includes funding for compliance work. The outlook for spending all of those funds before the FY deadline looks promising. Grassland work in the scaled quail area was ready to go until arch sites were found, causing the project to delay until this can be addressed. Region 5 may be able to shift the funding to work in other areas if necessary.

A new Game Branch Chief to replace Brian Wakeling has not been hired yet, and it's unclear how the hiring freeze will affect this situation.

### **Local HPC & Nongovernmental Organizations Reports and Success Stories**

Chip Young, Region 6 Landowner Relations Program: The region is in the process of getting compliance work done for 8 catchments in Unit 21 which are part of the mule deer WHEI. Chip also provided several updates on work in the WHEI. Contact Chip for specifics.

Tom Mackin, Williams/Flagstaff HPC: The Dog Knobs Trick Tank project will take place this spring. There are still some carryover items from late in the fall work season to complete. Tom and other volunteers have been maintaining the Pat Springs Pipeline for 18 years and most of the infrastructure on it is completed.

Billy Masters for Springerville/Alpine HPC: 100 acres of the Buckelew project are done and the project is still in progress. On the Dobson Grassland project, the landowner portion is complete which includes new storage tanks funded by NRCS. They are also working on the issue of elk not being able to drink out of them. There are big concerns about the New Mexico jumping mouse issue. The sensitivity of this issue has taken up a good portion of USFS resources. This has a negative impact for all constituents of the USFS. ADOT's right of way fencing is not wildlife friendly. Steve Rosenstock said that the Department is involved with ADOT to correct all their fencing statewide. The region 1 area is receiving a lot of positive national attention about the San Juan fire and how HPC treatments were valuable in helping to control the fire.

Bob Birkeland for Show Low HPC: Pink Cliffs catchment is almost complete. Stewardship agreements are in place for 13 dirt tanks in Unit 3C. Lots of NEPA and arch work have been completed by USFS and this is great for the local HPC. The biomass plant located between Show Low and Vernon is helping with maintenance treatments against grassland juniper invasion, and the USFS is planning and conducting prescribed burning in the Rodeo/Chediski fire area.

Bob Birkeland for Winslow HPC: Development Branch has been working on compliance work for a Unit 4B water catchment. Archaeological clearances, will have to be contracted. In the meantime, the wildlife manager is working with the Black Mesa Ranger District's archaeologist. Good work by the local WM and the HPC has helped make progress in reducing the 50K gallons of water per year that need to be hauled to catchments.

Mike Sumner for the Southwest Arizona HPC: The HPC is in need of leadership. They will be working with the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club on 2 water projects in the next few months – Scadden Tank in cooperation with ADBSS and Red Cliff in Buckskin Mountains. Six weekend projects are scheduled.

Ed Jahrke and Joe Currie for Development Branch: Since July 1, they've completed 3 BLM redevelopments in the Mt. Trumbull area, using Pittman-Robertson funds and BLM assistance money. Siegmiller Mountain and

Wolf Hole 1 catchments should be done by the end of February. In Unit 5A, 2 catchments in Leonard Pt. area and Rock Climb Catchment, near Starlight Pines, are scheduled. Three projects are slated to take place in the Music Mountains by the end of April. Thomas Tank was completed using internal crews. This weekend Silverbell Mountain 1 will take place, with ADBSS. Development Branch is providing materials for the Scadden Tank project while Region 4 and ADBSS will carry out the work. Brushy will start in mid-March and Dinner Pockets in April on the Kaibab. Joe has completed paperwork for 5 waters in the Drakes near Chino Valley, as well as 5 catchments near Lake Pleasant. Catchment 652 Red Mountain Tank will be added to the schedule. This one is a high priority due to water hauling. There may be a categorical exclusion for this one. It was noted that some cattle have gone through the pipe rail fences around water catchments and this needs to be evaluated.

Dave Daniels for Payson Natural Resources Committee: The group is experiencing good participation. Nine projects have been funded in Units 22 and 23. Arizona Elk Society has taken inventory and identified 100 old beat up USFS drinkers and the group is assisting USFS with a plan that will aim to fix all 100 drinkers. Arch clearance is done on Potato Butte for the dirt tank and there is a prescribed burn ready to go.

Glen Dickens for the Sierra Vista/Douglas HPC: Five of their 7 project proposals were funded. There is a Gould's study going on, as well as the Santa Catalina Mountains bighorn sheep project. Of 61 sheep released, 49 are still on the ground and only 2 mortalities were lion kills this year. Region 5 has done an outstanding job with this translocation project. On the 3-year pronghorn initiative in Sonoita Plains: 46 miles of fence have been removed or modified leading to 44,000 acres of connectivity. AAF has received another \$200K NFWF grant to carry the initiative through 2017. The goal of connectivity is 100K acres. MDF and AAF pay for a contracted coyote hunter, who has harvested 50-70 coyotes annually, focusing on fawning areas. Pronghorn population trends: Babocomari Ranch – up to 60 pronghorn from 17 in 36 months. The estimate is about 225 pronghorn in the whole area, with most of the increased numbers as a result of coyote control. They also met with ADOT for a volunteer fencing project on Hwy 83. Thanks to Game Branch staff for their help in providing expenditure information on the antelope tag fund.

Duane Aubuchon for Safford HPC: Southeast Arizona Sportsmen Club has been repairing various waters. The Mesa Re-entry prescribe burn is complete. Other HPC projects in the area that are complete: PERP and the 76 Ranch project in the Pinalenos. Turtle Mountain was completed last year with HPC dollars and the rancher's drought funds. On the KJ Ranch project, 390 acres are done. A total of 15,000 acres of Bonita Grassland have been treated. Their next meeting is March 18, 2015.

Darren Tucker for the Prescott HPC: LHPC has been working on the Central Arizona Grasslands Conservation Strategy (CAGCS) on prescribed burns and other grassland habitat work. Large scale NEPA should be complete soon and the LHPC will push for projects in this focus area. One success story is the partnership with Maughan Ranches and how it's helped with access issues. The HPC process funded Cellar Basin Trick Tank. And the ranch in turn has granted access for youth hunts. Maughan Ranches wants to focus on hunting opportunities for youth and wounded warriors.

Steve Rosenstock for Forage Resource Study Group and the Arizona Strip: The groups have been working on catchments. There is no word on the leadership of FRSG now that Stephen Williams has retired, but Steve will find out. Steve would like to hear from anyone who is having issues with the USFS due to challenges with water developments.

Other:

- Commissioner Harris reported that over \$1.6 million was funded for this year's HPC cycle.
- RMEF spends many of their banquet dollars in this state.
- It was suggested that the HPC needs to start considering paying for NEPA and other compliance work such as archaeological clearances.

**Date and location of next State HPC meeting:**

July 25, 2015 at the Department's Region 1 office in Pinetop.

- 9am

The meeting adjourned at 11:45am.

DRAFT